

DELANEY UNLIKELY TO STAY UP FRONT

HAVING fought back from 2-0 down at the Stadium on Saturday to clinch a draw, Wycombe Wanderers bid for a place in the first round proper of the F.A. Cup tonight (Tuesday) when they meet Croydon in the replay at Loakes Park. Victory would give them a home tie against Southern League Bedford (writes Stuart Earp).

Both sides report full-strength teams for the game, although several players are suffering from minor injuries. This means Howard Kennedy is likely to retain his place in midfield at Dave Alexander's expense. Kennedy, who has not played for the Blues for quite a time, put in a hard working performance on Saturday and played a major role in Wanderers' recovery.

One of the main reasons Wycombe survived at Croydon was a tactical switch by their manager Brian Lee. He gambled on bringing centre-half John Delaney up from defence into the forward line. The move caused havoc among the home defence and the Blues scored twice to retain their interest in the competition. But the manager is unlikely to play Delaney up front in the replay.

Mr. Lee felt the shock tactics were warranted in those closing stages but they were special circumstances and he will probably pin his faith in the normal set of forwards who started the match on Saturday. Delaney was certainly effective up front but he is a natural defender and it is no easy task to switch to a foreign position.

Anyone thinking this replay will be a formality for the home side could well be in for a surprise. I was impressed by Croydon's organisation and teamwork and they dominated the game for long periods. In Cliff Hall, they have an extremely skilful forward and midfield is also effective. It was at the back that they showed a certain amount of weakness.

If Wanderers can subject the back four to concerted pressure Croydon could well crack. Many feel Wanderers cannot play as poorly again. Certainly in the first half they just couldn't get their game together at all. Poor service from midfield affected

the front runners who were hardly given a look in. Had it not been for Tony Horseman's superb free-kick, Croydon might well have been meeting Bedford at the first attempt.

Croydon manager Ted Shepard is toying with the idea of making one change to his side. Substitute Bernie Merron may play instead of young Cliff Gould at inside-forward. Merron impressed with his speed in the closing stages and almost laid on a winning goal. With Wycombe likely to press forward far more tonight, Merron's ability on the break would be dangerous.

Whatever the line-up, Croydon have proved themselves a difficult hurdle for the Blues, who will need to improve greatly if they are to succeed. But they will have the added advantage of playing in front of their own crowd in vastly different circumstances.

The Croydon Stadium pitch is surrounded by an athletics track with the spectators some 20 yards away. This made for a poor atmosphere despite the fact that there were 1,200 fans there. It must also be said that the Blues must have been affected by the death of the club chairman Jack Smethurst, who was greatly respected by the players.

Should a further game be necessary, it will have to be played by Monday, November 10. If both clubs agree the match will be staged on a neutral ground.

Meanwhile Wanderers announced a new signing this week. He is 19-year-old Bruce MacCrae from Wantage Town of the Rothmans Hellenic League. Brother of former Oxford City forward Bob, Bruce has been scoring goals regularly for Wantage and watched Wycombe at Croydon on Saturday.